

Today we are scheduled to conclude that debate on this important piece of legislation. It fundamentally is a bill which will substantially reduce overwhelming dependence on foreign sources of oil. It would move us toward energy independence. It strengthens our national security, and it helps reduce the cost of living for American families and businesses.

Moving toward that energy independence is not only possible, but it is the key to reducing the energy prices that people feel every day when they fill up their cars with gas, when they cool their homes, or other times of the year when they heat their homes. The high energy prices affect people in their everyday lives.

I believe energy independence can be achieved, but a first and very important major starting point will be to make sure we bring more of America's energy to American consumers. That is what the bill does by allowing deep sea exploration in the Gulf of Mexico.

As I mentioned, we have a cloture vote this afternoon, and I expect the final vote on the Energy Security Act hopefully sometime tomorrow.

There are a number of different issues before us as we continue to move and produce meaningful solutions to the problems facing Americans—and that is what we will continue to do.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

I ask unanimous consent that following the remarks by myself and Senator REID, Senator HAGEL be recognized for 30 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

109TH CONGRESS

Mr. REID. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Very difficult thing to get anything out of this . . . Congress. They don't want to do anything for the people. They are awful anxious to do things to the people, and they have done a lot of things to the people . . . and it's beginning to hurt.

That is a quote of Harry Truman.

Again:

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Those are the words of Harry Truman in 1948. He was referring to the 80th Congress, but those remarks are directly in tune with the 109th Congress.

Like the "do-nothing Congress" of 1948, it is "very difficult" to get anything out of this Republican Congress. The things they are doing are "beginning to hurt."

Look at national security. The majority's rubberstamping of President Bush in Iraq has made America less safe and emboldened our enemies such as Iran, North Korea, and al-Qaida. For the third week in a row, Iraq and the Middle East are plunging further into crisis, and what is the response of this Republican Congress? The estate tax, repeal of the estate tax.

Look at our economy. The majority's reckless fiscal policies have created a \$9 trillion debt, placing a birth tax on our children and our children's children. In recent years, the poor have gotten poorer and the rich have gotten richer, and the middle class have been squeezed.

What is the response of the Republicans? Repeal the estate tax—hundreds of billions of dollars to go to a small group of Americans, a very small group of Americans, a country with 300 million people. This repeal of the estate tax may affect 10,000 people—less than two-tenths of 1 percent of the American people.

Look how divided America has become. The majority's focus on issues such as marriage and flag desecration has divided our country and distracted this body from more pressing concerns, problems in health care, ignoring global warming, energy and gas prices.

I appreciate the distinguished majority leader saying he believes we should move to energy independence—and we certainly should. I support this drilling bill. President Clinton supported it. It allows drilling in the gulf coast. And it is important because it allows coastal restoration—and money goes to that. But it has little to do with energy independence.

With energy and gas prices and the rising cost to the middle class, what is the response of the Republicans? Repeal the estate tax.

There are just 15 legislative days left this year. Everyone knows that Mondays and Fridays are not voting days in this Republican Senate. That leaves us with 3 days this week and 12 when we return. What is the response of the Republicans today in the U.S. Senate? Move to repeal the estate tax. Fifteen days ahead of us, and behind us 19 wasted months. The truth is this Republican Congress is actually worse than the famous "do-nothing Congress" of 1948. That Congress worked almost a month longer than we have.

Republicans ought to be ashamed of their dismal record, but it is clear from press reports that they are not. I got up to read the Washington Post yesterday morning and was really appalled when I read a quote from the House Republican leader in which he actually bragged about how little this Congress has done.

I quote:

Republican leaders shrug off the "do-nothing" charge.

"You get used to hearing that nonsense," said House Majority Leader John Boehner (R-OH).

He went to say:

As for beating the 1948 Congress' record for lethargy, he joked, "Most Americans will be pretty happy with that."

I don't know what his congressional district is like and how people feel there, but in the rest of the country, that is not how they feel. Americans aren't "happy" that they are paying hundreds of dollars more for gasoline—sometimes every month—because this Republican Congress refuses to pass relief measures and won't investigate the surging profits of big oil. Exxon is going to make \$40 billion net profit this year—\$40 billion; British Petroleum, the best year they have ever had.

They will not be investigating the surging profits of big oil because this administration is the most oil-friendly administration in the history of the country.

This Congress doesn't have the political will necessary to rapidly make us more energy independent. And what is the Republican response? Repeal the estate tax for two-tenths of 1 percent of the American people, the richest of the rich.

Americans aren't "happy" that our troops are in the middle of a civil war in Iraq because the Republican Congress won't demand the President change course.

That is the law which passed on a bipartisan basis. The law, as we speak, is there should be a change of course in Iraq. The law says that the year 2006 will be a year of significant transition in Iraq. Not happening.

I get a report on my way to work every morning from my stalwart staffers. I talked to Nathan this morning on the way to work. He said:

Senator, I don't know where to start with Iraq. We know at least four American soldiers have been killed, as mentioned on page A10 of the Washington Post. It doesn't make the front page anymore.

The death and destruction of Iraq, as Nathan said, is hard to keep up with. In the past 24 hours, scores dead. Today, there were a dozen Iraqis beheaded. In the last month alone, 1,200 Iraqis have been killed, murdered. We tried to offer the military in Iraq a strategy for success, but Republicans chose instead to rubberstamp the President.

What is the response to date to all these problems? Repeal the estate tax. We have spent more time on repealing the estate tax than any other one issue for the entire Congress, in this Senate. It should be clear who the majority favors. We have spent all this time on less than .2 percent of the American people, costing the country hundreds of billions of dollars.

Americans are not happy this President has worn down, exhausted, overstretched our military. In a paper I don't read very often, the Washington Times today reported that the military is in a state of disrepair. If you are not on the front lines, you are using equipment that does not work, equipment that is in need of repair. As Senator JACK REED has said for months and months, we have a military infrastructure that is failing. The soldiers are